

**MASTER'S MINUTE, February 5, 2016 "Charity and Philanthropy”**

My Brothers,

In Masonry there is much emphasis placed on the word charity. We hear it in our ritual, we talk about it at meetings and dinners. We all have an understanding of what this word means, or do we?

Many men state as one of the purposes that they join Masonry is to have an opportunity to give back to the community. He joins because he wants a chance to become more charitable, but I would argue that what they believe they are seeking is not to be more charitable, but to be more philanthropic. Is this not the same thing? In some ways it is. But I would argue that there is a very important difference between the two. I will present you my personal take on charity and philanthropy, which I learned form a venerable Mason some years back, and which has really stuck with me over the years. You can take this or leave this as you wish.

Let me start by looking at each word, its origin and other synonyms that are associated with each word. These are referenced from Merriam-webster.com and Etymonline.com:

**Philanthropy**

from philanthropos (adj.) "loving mankind, useful to man," from phil- "loving" (see ***philo-***) + anthropos "mankind

*synonyms*: benevolence, generosity, humanitarianism, public-spiritedness, altruism, social conscience, magnanimity, munificence, liberality, beneficence

**Charity**

from Old French charité " mercy, compassion; alms; (Old North French carité), from Latin caritatem (nominative caritas) "costliness, esteem, affection" (in Vulgate often used as translation of Greek agape "love" -- especially Christian love of fellow

*synonyms*: goodwill, compassion, consideration, concern, kindness, kind-heartedness, tenderness, tender-heartedness, sympathy, indulgence, tolerance, leniency

Did you notice a difference between the two?

To me Philanthropy derives from a group effort to achieve a common good. A Lodge will sponsor a philanthropic event to spread benevolence, generosity, humanitarianism, public-spiritedness, altruism, social conscience… all these good things. On the other hand, Charity is a more personal thing. Charity comes from individual efforts of goodwill, compassion, consideration, concern, kindness, kind-heartedness, tenderness… etc.

I think Charity in Free Masonry has a similar allusion. If Masonry makes good men better it is because the lessons taught within it focus on charity from a personal level, which can then lead to philanthropic efforts within the organization. Nowhere in our ritual do you find the word philanthropy cited, but you will find charity highly stressed. From an individual effort comes the building of character. From that character can be built and organization that provides earnest and fulfilling philanthropy. I think it’s an important distinction remember. Philanthropy generally happens around events, but charity can happen every day.

**Remember Brothers… The greatest of these is CHARITY: for our *faith* may be lost in sight; *hope* ends in fruition; but *charity* extends beyond the grave, through the boundless realms of eternity. CHARITY is the brightest gem that can adorn our Masonic profession.**